

Catholic Church Records

Latin America “How to” Guide, Beginner Level: Instruction

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GOAL

In this guide, you will learn about Catholic Church records in Latin America

INTRODUCTION

Catholic Church records are some of the most complete sources of information for Hispanic genealogical research in Latin America. In 1563 the Council of Trent formalized record-keeping practices that were already being followed in much of the Catholic world. Separate record books were to be maintained for baptisms, marriages, and deaths/burials. A large percentage of the population is listed in these records. Often we can find two, and in some cases, three generations of ancestors in some of these records.

Catholic Church records are listed in the FamilySearch Catalog under the city or town where the parish is located. A parish is an ecclesiastical jurisdiction where a Catholic priest serves and keeps records. Because the majority of the records were kept by the parish priest, these records are known as *Registros Parroquiales* (parish registers).

To learn more about Catholic Church records, please read the FamilySearch Wiki article [“Catholic Parish Records in Latin America.”](#)

INSTRUCTION

There are three commonly used parish record types used in the majority of genealogical research in Latin America. They are:

- Baptisms – *Bautismos*
- Marriages - *Matrimonios*
- Deaths/Burials – *Defunciones/Entierros*

Information found in the records

Baptisms/Christenings

A child's baptism in the Catholic Church could happen any time between the first few minutes after birth to several days or months later. Generally, most baptisms were performed within a few days because there was a fear that the child might not live. Whether or not a date of birth was given will vary, depending on the priest and time period. Every baptismal record will state in some manner whether the child is a legitimate or natural born (illegitimate). The most common information found in baptismal records are:

- Name of the child
- Birth date
- Baptism date and place
- Names and surnames of the parents (if only a mother is listed, the child was natural born or illegitimate). Sometimes their origin and/or residence
- Sometimes the names and surnames of the grandparents
- Names of the godparents

Marriages

The Catholic Church marriage imposes four requirements:

1. The couple is free to marry
2. They freely exchange their consent
3. They have the intention to marry for life
4. Their consent is given in presence of two witnesses and before the properly authorized Catholic Church priest.

In these records we can find valuable information. We can find if the groom and/or bride is a widower/widow, and the name of the deceased former spouse. In Latin America, marriages usually took place in the bride's parish. It is important to carefully look at the names of the godparents and witnesses, because sometimes they are related to the couple. The most common information found in the marriage record is:

- Marriage date and place
- Names of the groom and the bride; you may find their ages, place of origin, and place of residence
- Previous marital status
- Names of the parents, if they are still living, place of residence, etc.
- Names of the godparents and witnesses

Deaths/Burials

The Catholic Church death registers are recorded in the parish where the person died. They are usually the least used of any parish records. They vary in format and length depending on the age and status of the deceased, as well as the discretion of the priest. In most death records, the women are recorded by their maiden name. In some records, if the woman had a surviving spouse, the spouse was named. If the deceased person was a widow, the deceased spouse may have been named. At times the priest noted if the person died testate, meaning he or she recorded a will. The most common information found in the death record is:

- Name of the deceased, date, and cause of death
- Date and place of the burial
- Sometimes age, place of residence, and marital status
- Names of the parents (if single or a child)
- Name of the spouse (if married)
- Names of surviving children

PRACTICE

Someone you are helping is looking for their grandfather who was born in Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, Mexico, between 1880 and 1900. His name is Justo Arellano. His parents were Eleuterio and Eulalia Arellano. To begin your search you will want to find his Catholic Church baptismal information in the indexed records, you can do it following these instructions:

1. Go to www.FamilySearch.org
2. Click on **Search**, then select **Records**
3. Enter the first name **Justo**, and then the last name **Arellano**
4. Type the name of the town **Casas Grandes** in the birthplace box, then type the birth year range: From **1880** to **1900**
5. In the fields to **Restrict Records By Location**, type the name of the country: **Mexico**, then type the name of the state: **Chihuahua**
6. Click on **Search**.
7. Near the top of the results list you should see **Jose Justo De Jesus Arellano**, who was christened **5 June 1892**. This is our man, click on his name (blue letters)
8. With the indexed image answer the following questions. **Note:** The film number is found in the section Citing this record or next to the words GS Film number

What is the complete name of the child?	Jose Justo de Jesus Arellano
When was his christening date?	5 June 1892
What is the name of the Catholic Church?	San Antonio de Padua
What is the film number?	162487

Remember it is ALWAYS is better to view the original image to find more information. If you want to see the original record, follow the steps found in the "Accessing FamilySearch Digital Images" How to guide.

ACTIVITY

Now, test your skills you have learned in this "How to" Guide. The Activity is a way to check your knowledge and let you know you've mastered the Guide! [Click here](#) to try out the Activity.